

The conservation group WWF has reported that a bright pink millipede and a striped rabbit are among more than a thousand new species which have been discovered along the banks of the Mekong River in south east Asia within the last ten years. This report from Rob Norris:

The **conservationists** are describing the **largely unexplored** jungles and wetlands in the Mekong Delta as **a biological treasure trove**. The discoveries, made in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Burma and China, range from the world's largest huntsman spider, which has a leg span of thirty centimetres, to a wild banana with purple skin. The Conservation Science Advisor to WWF, Mark Wright, says that between 1997 and 2007, scientists found an average of two previously undiscovered species every week:

Mark Wright:

"Probably my favourite is the Dragon Millipede - it's only three centimetres long - absolutely **lurid pink**, and it produces **cyanide** to try **to deter predators**. I mean this is a real creature **with attitude** here. And then there are a few other things which I think show the way science works - one, the beautifully named Laotian Rock Rat, was discovered in a local food market, so the people who live there were very aware of this creature, but science came to it very late."

They remained unknown in the outside world for so long because political **conflicts** in the region kept scientists away until the 1990s.

WWF is warning that the main challenge facing the area is how to allow economic development while still **maintaining environmental protection**.

Rob Norris, BBC

Vocabulary and definitions

conservationists	people who work to protect the environment
largely unexplored	most of the area has not been visited by scientists
a biological treasure trove	a place where there are many fantastic animals and plants which haven't been seen by scientists before
lurid pink	a very bright, strong pink colour
cyanide	a very poisonous substance
to deter predators	to protect itself from animals that might want to eat it
with attitude	with an aggressive personality
conflicts	wars and disagreements
maintaining environmental protection	keeping the plants and animals safe

More on this story: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_pictures/7780514.stm

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/witn/2008/12/081215_mekong_diversity.shtml